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FRANCE: CURRENT DEFENSE POLICY ISSUES

Summary

The French are concerned about the "zero option" proposal for intermediate range nuclear forces in Europe and are aghast about the discussion concerning the elimination of all US and Soviet ballistic missiles from their inventories. They believe strongly that a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty and the proposed South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone treaty will have an adverse impact on their nuclear forces, which continue to receive priority in the defense budget. Paris continues to cooperate closely with Bonn on military exercises.

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Overall US-French relations remain good, although the French are concerned about US positions on issues such as arms control and the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone. The Chirac government has followed the practice established under President Mitterrand and the Socialists of cooperating more closely with Washington (and Bonn) on issues of importance to both sides.

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Topics of InterestFrench Views on Reykjavik Pre-Summit

The French government, both publicly and privately, has expressed its dismay over both the scope and US handling of negotiations at Reykjavik. Paris is uneasy about the "zero INF option" in Europe and extremely leery over the ballistic missile free world proposal. In their analysis, removal of US and Soviet INF from Europe could undermine the French domestic consensus

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favoring an independent deterrent and increase pressures for reduction of its own nuclear forces. French military officials believe that nuclear deterrence is still absolutely necessary and that talk of total elimination of ballistic missiles is impractical and irresponsible. Their feelings about a non-nuclear world are even more negative.

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The French were satisfied that the Soviets did not push for inclusion of French and British nuclear deterrents at Reykjavik,

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President Mitterrand has publicly stated that he does not expect to be involved in the arms control talks until the United States and the Soviet Union have drastically reduced their arsenals and until the Warsaw Pact's preponderance in conventional force and chemical warfare capabilities has been redressed. The French also have added the condition that there be no increases in strategic defenses, reflecting their deep reservations over the implications of SDI. In this regard, French officials believe that SDI will stimulate Soviet strategic defense efforts and thereby threaten the long-term effectiveness of their own strategic systems.

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South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone and Comprehensive Test Ban

Paris remains adamantly opposed to a comprehensive nuclear testing ban, because of its impact on France's nuclear force modernization program. The government claims that it must conduct tests in the South Pacific to preserve and modernize its deterrent force. Consequently, the French object to the proposal for a South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone (SPNFZ). Mururoa Atoll in the South Pacific is France's only facility for conducting nuclear tests, and Paris has consistently ruled out moving the test center to metropolitan France, or even to another French possession. Constructing a test center elsewhere would be enormously costly and probably prohibitive even in more prosperous times. For this reason, France has noted that it would regard ratification of SPNFZ by the US or other allies as "an unfriendly act" and has consistently pressured US officials, both in Washington and in Paris, not to sign the treaty.

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Attitudes Toward Conventional Arms Control Negotiations

Paris objects to holding European conventional arms control negotiations in an alliance-to-alliance forum outside the CSCE framework. France was a moving force behind the creation of the 35-nation CDE security conference under CSCE, and this forum has special appeal in French eyes. France rejects alliance-to-alliance negotiations in part because the distinction

of its non-participation in NATO's integrated military structure would be lost and France would be subject to more direct pressure from the US and other allies. Paris understands the importance of a coordinated Western view on conventional arms control issues in Europe, particularly if talks on eliminating INF missiles in Europe are successful. In our view, however, the French want to maintain a separate voice in the formulation of Western positions, and Paris may well choose to be excluded rather than compromise its independence. [redacted]

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Chad

Despite a continuing reassessment of the situation, Paris apparently has decided for now to maintain its defensive strategy of deterring Libyan aggression below the 16th parallel while discouraging Chadian leader Habre from launching an offensive in the north. [redacted]

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[redacted] political atmosphere is now more in favor of supporting a Habre offensive under certain conditions, but the [redacted]

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[redacted] and believes that Libyan troops will eventually withdraw from Chadian territory because of internal problems. We believe that Prime Minister Chirac, for his part, has much more pressing domestic concerns now and probably will try to avoid any possibility of a conflict with Mitterrand over French policy toward Chad. [redacted]

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Despite a reluctance to see French blood spilled in Chad, we believe that Paris would probably give Habre the necessary air cover if he launched an offensive independently and Libyan troops counterattacked. The French government would irreparably harm its reputation among Francophone African nations if Habre got into military difficulties and France left him hanging. [redacted]

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1987 Defense Budget

The Chirac government's 1987 defense budget represents a substantial change from the low-growth budgets of the Socialists. The current projections call for real growth to be nearly 5 percent in 1987, and all of it will go toward equipment expenditures. Some of the funds for this increase have come from the already tight Operations and Maintenance budget and slight savings from continuing manpower cuts begun under the Socialists.

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The government's recently announced five-year military program law calls for an annual average of 6 percent real growth in equipment expenditures over the five-year period -- over 13 percent in 1987, but only 4.5 percent after 1988. It is doubtful, however, that this growth rate can be maintained. The French will face a serious resource crunch by 1990 as a number of programs which the Socialists had delayed, stretched out, or postponed--including new fighter aircraft, an aircraft carrier, and a new generation tank, as well as the SX mobile missile--begin to enter production. Without substantially increased defense expenditures the French will almost certainly have to postpone some conventional force modernization programs, or make continued cuts in operations and readiness.

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Defense Policy Debate?

The French press has recently talked of the maneuvering between President Mitterrand and Prime Minister Chirac over who is in charge of formulating basic French defense policy.

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Specifically, the President publicly disagreed with the idea of "disassociating" tactical nuclear weapons from the strategic force -- to emphasize the close tie between the two, the French refer to their tactical nuclear weapons as "pre-strategic". He also warned against moving ahead with the SX mobile IRBM--intended to replace aging Mirage IV bombers and vulnerable S-3 IRBMs--at the expense of the M-5 SLBM. Advisors to Chirac and Giraud have told US Embassy officers that this is a "false debate". The drafters of the speech, indicating that Mitterrand vetted the text beforehand, have stressed that Chirac's intent was to signal a prudent shift in French defense policy while avoiding a domestic political dispute with the President. The speechwriters also claim that it was intended to "rein in" Defense Minister Giraud, whose idea of a major redeployment of French forces they consider an

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unrealistic personal initiative that has little support within the French government. [REDACTED]

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Defense Cooperation with West Germany--Implications for NATO

In September, 3500 French troops stationed in West Germany participated alongside 5000 American and 50,000 West German troops in a trilateral, non-NATO exercise near the Fulda Gap. Both the French and the Germans have billed this training as a warm-up for a September 1987 exercise in West Germany that will include 20,000 soldiers from the French Army's Rapid Action Force (FAR) in their first significant participation in a European scenario. The French have stressed that these exercises in no way signal a change in their policy of not placing forces under NATO control -- the exercises, however, underscore Paris' continuing commitment--begun under the Socialist government--to strengthening its military (and political) ties with West Germany as well as an implicit recognition that France has responsibilities that extend beyond its own territory. Despite this improved military cooperation, the Embassy reports little headway in other Franco-German cooperation initiatives, particularly Bonn's interest in closer coordination of French nuclear planning. [REDACTED]

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AWACS

The recently released five-year program law includes funding for an airborne early warning system, and the French Air Force continues to favor buying the Boeing E-3A AWACS aircraft. Nonetheless, they have decided to test fly the latest model of the British Nimrod before making a final decision. [REDACTED]

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Cost is likely to be a major factor in the final decision, and French willingness to consider a joint purchase with the British is based on the belief that it will lower unit costs. The decision to waive the non-recurring costs for the AWACS aircraft should weigh heavily in Boeing's favor, but some interoperability quids may be too high a price for the French to pay. For example, we believe they would be more likely to agree to specific training or joint maintenance requirements or putting certain types of equipment (such as JTIDS) on their aircraft than they would be to some operational arrangements, such as allowing US E-3s to use French bases. [REDACTED]

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SUBJECT: FRANCE: Current Defense Policy Issues

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